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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HANOI 000466

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FOR EAP/MLS

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TAGS: PHUM PREL VM

SUBJECT: DCM MEETING WITH MINISTRY OF PUBLIC SECURITY

REF: HCMC 359

Classified By: DCM Virginia E. Palmer, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: In a May 18 meeting with Ministry of Public Security (MPS) Deputy Director of the General Security Division General To Lam, DCM covered a range of issues including the expanded HCMC consular district and delays in approval for staff expansion, cooperation in the upcoming bilateral Defense Dialogue, land claim protests in front of the Consulate in HCMC, and use of U.S. diplomatic plates by non-diplomatic vehicles in Hanoi. Lam repeated complaints that Ambassador's meetings with dissidents encouraged them to work against the government, and that Vietnamese groups in the U.S. are plotting violent action against the GVN. End summary.

MPS Supports Larger District; MFA Has Lead

¶2. (C) On the HCMC consular district, DCM noted we are very near an agreement and said the GVN's demonstrated willingness to facilitate provincial travel by U.S. Mission officers would be key to any final agreement. She expressed hope that MPS would play a constructive role in this effort as well as our efforts to secure GVN approval for new positions at the Consulate and Embassy.

¶3. (C) Lam responded that MFA has the lead on the issue, but that it was the opinion of the MPS that it would be best to expand the HCMC consular district as much as possible. Lam went on that many local authorities are suspicious of U.S. provincial travel, but it is the job of the MPS and MFA to help explain this to them and facilitate the travel. Some activities MPS can explain easily, Lam added, winding up for a harangue on meetings with dissidents, while there are some on which MPS needs to work with the U.S. Mission. On staffing, Lam said the growth in staffing at the U.S Mission in Vietnam was a natural reflection of our deepening bilateral relations which MPS supports, but MFA has the lead in negotiating with State Department on this issue.

No U.S. Role in HCMC Land Protests

¶4. (C) Noting that HCMC CG had been called in by local authorities and accused of encouraging land protests at the Consulate (Reftel), DCM said this charge was completely false; while we respect the rights of protesters to express their opinions, our concern is that for safety and security reasons they should do so at a reasonable distance from the Consulate. Lam replied that people do have rights to present land claims; he had heard that people were seeking to use the visit of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) to present petitions, encouraged by others behind the scenes. DCM noted that the incidents predated the arrival of USCIRF and, in any case, the U.S. was not in any way fomenting the protests.

¶15. (C) Regarding the upcoming bilateral Defense Dialogue in which MPS (along with MFA and MOD) will participate, DCM asked about deliverables for the Dialogue, perhaps building on the recent visit to the U.S. by MPS Minister Anh. Lam said the Minister's meeting had reaffirmed the relations between our countries. He agreed that the Dialogue should build on this with substantive progress. Essential to any progress, Lam said, is building trust. He said concrete progress since the last Dialogue includes the expected permission for the USNS Heezen to conduct underwater surveys in support of POW/MIA activities at the end of this month. Lam said the GVN was working on interagency positions, but offered no concrete suggestions for topics or deliverables for the next round.

Who's Cruising Hanoi in U.S. Dip Plates?

¶16. (C) Turning to an issue of local concern, DCM presented Lam with a list of cars driving around Hanoi with U.S. diplomatic plates that are not in fact related to the U.S. Mission. Lam seemed genuinely pleased to discuss a straightforward law enforcement issue; he said that while this was an issue for the traffic police (who are also under MPS), he would ensure the issue receives their full attention.

Differences on Dissidents

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¶17. (C) DCM raised reports from U.S. sources that a Hmong man in the Northwest Highlands murdered his wife and mother and severely injured another man because they are Christians, with no action taken by police. While such reports may not always be credible, it is important that we have information with which to respond when they are raised, DCM said. Given a copy of the report, Lam said it looked completely incredible, but that he would check on it and get back to us.

¶18. (C) DCM said we were disappointed by the letter "An Unusual Story" in the May 11 edition of Tuoi Tre daily regarding the Ambassador's meeting with dissident Do Nam Hai, which was a complete fabrication (Note: Also, we suspect, an MPS product the paper was forced to run. End note.). This was not only an unwelcome attack on our Ambassador but a blow to journalistic integrity in Vietnam. Lam responded that the Ambassador's meetings with dissidents have not been in keeping with our agreement that press would not be involved. Dissidents take advantage of photos of themselves with the Ambassador or DCM to claim on the internet that the U.S. Mission supports their agenda. DCM responded that while we do not publicize these meetings, MPS must surely understand that we cannot control the actions of those who do somewhat brazenly. We concluded the discussion by agreeing that "more transparency" and press freedom were desirable.

¶19. (C) The Embassy pays far too much attention to a handful of people who want to overthrow the Vietnamese government, Lam said. The Ambassador and his staff should spend more time meeting other people and following issues such as the economy, health, education, and culture, Lam continued, again somewhat brazenly. DCM responded that the Mission does indeed spend the majority of its time and resources on other issues. A strong Vietnam, however, should be able to accept the views of its patriotic citizens who may disagree with the government, she said.

¶10. (C) In this connection, DCM, said, the GVN's actions against respected attorney Le Tran Luat seem clearly connected to his defense of the Thai Ha parishioners in their appeal trial in Hanoi. Luat is a cheat who stole money from

his clients, Lam responded - there is proof of his illegal activity including a signed confession of all his crimes and Luat's voluntary closure of his law office. It strains credibility to believe that the "crimes" were discovered just as the appeal by the Thai Ha parishioners was being heard, DCM said, noting that the incident called into question the role and future of independent lawyers in Vietnam. Luat will only be allowed to practice again if he proves his innocence, Lam said.

¶12. (C) Lam said MPS had repeatedly requested that the U.S. also deal with "terrorist organizations" based in the U.S. which seek to overthrow the government of Vietnam. DCM again said we would welcome any concrete information on violent activities by such organizations, which would also be violations of U.S. law.

MICHALAK